

## 4. Warnings

\*\*\*Guinevere\*\*\*

As I y over the beautiful mountains and streams of Oregon, I'm reminded of my time with Missus Cromwell.

Master Thomas drops me off at a small well in the middle of the woods in the early hours of the morning. My back hurts quite a bit. We had traveled for upwards of three days and I now had no idea where I was. Master Thomas points down in the distance. "Follow the path until you reach a stream. Turn right at the old oak and walk until you come upon a small cottage. Missus Cromwell will be waiting for you."

Before I can ask anymore questions, Master Thomas starts his horses and disappears into the forest. Alone and frightened, I follow his instructions and trot down the path.

Images of the burning pyre ash through my mind but I quickly seek comfort in my surroundings. The forest was quiet but peaceful and I feel relief when I come upon the stream Master Thomas described. I nd a nice little spot to rest and drink until my stomach is full.

I had only eaten a few mouthfuls of bread over the past three days and I was famished. The water does me good and I start up my journey again towards the little cottage I was expected to nd.

I come upon the cottage as the sun peaks over the sky. As I raise a hand to knock, a beautiful young lady, no older than 20 moons, opens the door and smiles at me.

"H-hello, good day ma' lady," I smile. "I'm looking for Missus-"

I don't even nish my inquiry when I'm pulled in through the door and have the air squeezed out of my lungs by the young woman.

"Why, you look just like your mother," she giggles, giving me another hardy squeeze before releasing me.

I suck in a huge gulp of air, making the woman throw her head back in laughter.

"Apologies, dearie. I tend to get a little over excited with visitors," she smiles. "Come sit Guinevere. Tell me, how was your journey? Did master Thomas treat you right? He can be a bit of a brute but he's perfectly harmless."

I offer her a sheepish smile when she suddenly gasps at a realization.

"Oh goodness gracious!" She squeals. "Where are my manners?" She chuckles as she grabs her skirts and curtsies for me. "Missus Cromwell at your service."

My mouth hangs ajar in shock. I had expected an elderly woman with silver hairs and perhaps even a mole on her nose! But Missus Cromwell was quite beautiful, with owing blond locks, skin of porcelain and eyes as blue as the sea.

"I met your mother over a century ago. She was a good laugh, that Sarah," she chuckles before her face grows solemn. "I'm terribly sorry for your loss, darling. If I could have just convinced her not to fall for that man, she would still be alive."

"I presume you mean father?" I mutter, staring at my feet.

I did not like my father. Mum, like all witches, was born an immortal being. When she met my father, she gave her immortality back to Earth Goddess so she could grow old with him. But my father was a wicked man. He saw her age and sought another to satisfy his appetite, a girl twelve years his junior. I had no doubt it was he who sent those villagers after us, exposing my mother as a witch and sending her to a eryl grave.

"Unfortunately yes," Missus Cromwell sighs. "I told your mother no man was worth giving up immortality for. Men only want pretty, young girls," she huffs. "Love begins to die at the rst sign of wrinkles."

My heart grows heavy as I remember the burning pyre I had witnessed several nights ago. Suddenly an alarming thought enters my mind.

"Missus Cromwell! My brother!" I shout, my mind swirling in worry for the little boy. He was only 2 years old. "What will happen to my little brother, Charlie? Mum... s-she went back to go get him! I need to nd him and bring him-"

"No," Missus Cromwell shakes her head. "I'm sorry Guinevere, but that is impossible. Humans are not allowed in my home or my lands. Master Thomas has never even set foot here. You can't bring your brother here."

"But he's just a babe, Missus Cromwell!" I cry, a stream of tears owing down my cheeks. "Please, he has no one else but me... please let me get him back."

But Missus Cromwell only shakes her head. "I'm sorry child... but there's nothing I can do for a human."

I clench my hands at my side. "Then I must go," I say quietly. "I must go get my brother."

"You'll be killed, Guinevere," she sighs. "You can not risk your life for a human."

"Mum risked hers for his!"

"And look what good that did her!" Missus Cromwell snaps, her voice echoing off the walls of the cottage. "Your mother left you in my care and it is my responsibility to keep you alive until you come of age."

I stare at the beautiful woman before me, wondering how her heart could be so cruel. Her face softens as she looks back and she groans in frustration.

"Follow me," she says quietly, turning on her heel and disappearing down the hall.

I hesitate, looking back at the door, my only means of escape.

"Don't even think about it!" Missus Cromwell calls out from the hall.

I mutter to myself and tread onwards until I reach a large room with books and vials on every wall. There's a large table in the center of the room, open books, notes, feathers, and other mysterious objects littering it's surface. On the wall opposite the door, there's a re pit and chimney ejecting the smoke out of the cottage. A small caldrn hangs over the dying re.

"Come here child," Missus Cromwell instructs as she absentmindedly glides from bookshelf to bookshelf, collecting vials and other items while muttering something under her breath.

She throws some mysterious liquids into the caldrn, humming to herself as she works. When she seems satished with the concoction, she turns to me and plucks a hair from my head.

Grinning from ear to ear, Missus Cromwell tosses the hair in the caldrn and the once dying re comes alive, bringing her concoction to a boil.

"Look inside," Missus Cromwell says, shoving me towards the re pit.

I tentatively look into the caldrn, the dark liquid swirling inside. I turn to Missus Cromwell, completely confused by her instructions.

"Look closely," she says.

I turn back to the caldrn, staring intently at the spinning liquid. I'm about to give up when the liquid gives way to an image of a small child with ery red hair and tiny freckles speckled across the bridge of his nose.

"Charlie!" I cry excitedly.

The image expands, the small boy playing with a young woman with dark brown curls and a warm smile. She kisses his cheeks as she hands him a small wooden toy.

"It seems your mother got him to a family before her demise," Missus Cromwell says, placing her hand on my shoulder. "Your brother is going to be ne. He's being looked after by a young couple who could not bear their own children. You needn't worry any further for the boy."

I stare at the images playing in the swirling waters, watching my brother be showered with affection by the young couple.

"We have much to do Guinevere," Missus Cromwell says, her voice smooth and calm. "I must prepare you to receive your gifts. A young witch like yourself has many powers and you must learn to control them all if you are to survive."

Keeping my eyes on the caldrn, I ask the question burning my thoughts.

"Why can't humans come here?" I whisper. "Why don't you trust them?"

I hear her sigh and turn to look her in the eyes.

"I've lived long enough to understand you cannot trust most creatures that walk this earth," she says solemnly. "Humans... they're ruthless, warmongering creatures hell bent on destroying everything they touch," she shrugs. "They fear what they don't understand and fear is deadly.

Werewolves are no different. Their territorial nature makes them creatures of war. Those bloody mutts will kill a witch on sight, no questions asked," Missus Cromwell was practically shaking with anger. "Faes are similar, attacking anything that does not look like them."

Behind the anger in her voice, I notice the pain lingering within every word she breathed.

Was the world truly so cruel?

"But the Dragons..." Missus Cromwell continues, a dry laugh tickling her throat. "The dragons are the most vile beings to ever walk this earth. Beware the dragons, Guinevere, for they are living snakes, snakes who at the slightest indication of weakness will turn on you. Never trust a dragon."

I would remain in Missus Cromwell's care for the following 20 years, training under her watchful eye to utilize my powers. She made it clear she was not my mother but it didn't stop me from loving her as one. She was a patient instructor, taking the time to teach me how to cast spells and listen to the calls of the earth.

As my plane lands, I rush out onto the tarmac, practically kissing the ground and thanking Earth Goddess for bringing me back to the ground.

An ocean mist envelops San Francisco, creating a thin layer of fog around the city. Gathering my bag, I briskly walk to a nearby payphone and wait patiently for the line to connect.

"Hello?" Patrick answers, his voice showing confusion.

"Patty," I smile sheepishly, holding the phone close to my ear. I still didn't fully understand these stupid machines. "Patty, can you hear me, darling?"

I hear a hearty laugh on the other side and know he can.

"Congratulations Gwen, you've learned to use a phone!" he laughs, to which I respond with a growl.

"Ha ha, very funny, mutt," I say atly, Patrick erupting with laughter. "I need your help, please."

He falls silent instantly. "Whatever you need, Gwen, it's yours. You know that."

I smile at his reply. He was my most trusted friend.

"I need a lift from the Airport and lodging nearby if you can arrange it."

"Nonsense, Gwen. You stay here," he responds, leaving no room for arguments. "My beta happens to be on business in the city. I'll arrange for him to pick you up. Hang tight, Gwen. I'll get you here safe and sound."

My smile deepens. Patrick is the type of friend that never asks questions, he just helps. I loved him dearly. He was one of the few people left in this world I trusted with my life.

"Thank you, darling."

"Always, Gwen. You know I'm always here," he replies.

After my phone call, I go on the hunt for a proper meal and wait about an hour before I sense werewolves in the vicinity. Patrick's Beta, Sawyer and his gamma Nathan, meet me at the airport entrance, collecting my things and placing them in the car

"You look lovely as usual," Sawyer smiles as I stare at the giant hunk of metal these people call SUV's. He chuckles to himself and offers his hand to me. "I see you still hate these," he grins. "They're perfectly safe, Gwen. I promise."

"Just drive," I shiver as I step into the vehicle, both Nathan and Sawyer laughing at me. It was going to be a long ride.

\*\*\*Salvador\*\*\*

The guards let me into the Blood Moon Mansion and lead me through a pair of double doors. Alpha Patrick is just nishing up a call and points to a chair across his desk.

After some brief greetings, Alpha Patrick gets right to the point.

"I must say I was rather surprised to receive your call," he says, his eyes staring intently at me. "I'm not sure what it is you seek from me but I will do my best to be of service to you in any way I can."

Figuring there was no use in lying about my relationship to Gwen, I respond without hesitation.

"I'd like to know where Gwen is," I reply nonchalantly. "I hear you're the guy to ask." The last few words leave a bitter taste in my mouth. I did not like the idea of Gwen befriendng another wolf that wasn't me. "She's my mate."

He smiles to himself. "Ah, yes. She told me ," he chuckles although I could not understand what was so funny.

"Great, where is she?" I ask, hanging on to my patience by a thread.

"Where she is is of little concern to you," he shrugs.

Marcos nearly loses it. Where is she, you insipid old man!?

I push back my chair with such violence, it almost shatters as it slams against the wall.

"She's my mate," I snarl through gritted teeth. "I assure you, it is my concern."

The Alpha doesn't even inch, sitting back in his chair with a cool air to him. It infuriates me even more but I bite my tongue.

"She left for a reason, young man," the Alpha replies. "If she wanted to be found, she would have let you know where she was going."

Where the f\*\*k is she!? Marcos growls.

Sense my growing anger, the Alpha rises from his seat.

"There is one thing you must understand about Guinevere," he sighs. "And that is that she runs. It doesn't matter who you are, if she senses danger she runs. I don't know where she too and if and when she's coming back. I just let her know that she is always welcomed back to my home any time."

That last part makes Marcos snarl in a frenzy. Her home is with us, he snarls.

But there was something I was more concerned about than her relationship to the old man.

"What is she running from?" I ask.

Alpha Patrick shakes his head. "That is something only she can explain. It is not my place to tell her life's story."

"But is she safe?" I plead, the anxiousness growing deeper in my heart.

"I will not lie, Salvador," the old man replies. "I do not know."

I try to wrap my head around the mystery of my witch. What was she running from and how could I keep her safe?

"But I can tell you this," the Alpha says, placing two hands on my shoulders. "If you do manage to nd the old girl, you cannot try to claim her."

"What?" Marcos and I snap.

She's ours! He growls. How can we not claim her?

"Guinevere has fought for her freedom now for over a century. No man or wolf will ever dominate her, Salvador," he sighs. "It's best you tame your wolf and not do anything you'll regret. You'll only push her away if you try to possess her. She's already been enslaved. Don't enslave her with your bond."

I could not understand. Mates are meant to claim each other. Her heart, her body, her soul belonged to me. And I belonged to her. How could it be any different?

Suddenly the double doors open, the scent of strawberries and sweet grass lling the room. Marcos purrs as the intoxicating smell of our mate kisses my nose. I spin around in time to see the look of sheer horror on Gwen's face.

"Mine," I whisper.